

Hans Lauenstein

Hamburg 13, am 1. November 1945
Brahmsallee 83

Sir,

the German Captainleutenant and Commanding Officer of the U.Boat 852 and two members of his U.Boat crew have been condemned to death by shooting, two other members of the crew sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.

I have no connection nor am I related or acquainted with the condemned prisoners, even I never have seen one of them. It is not due to me to form an opinion concerning the question of guilty or not guilty. In fact I am convinced that the proceedings proved that each judge honestly endeavoured to give a just verdict. Nevertheless I take the liberty to beg the High Commander of H.M. Occupation Forces for mercy and mitigation of the verdict.

I was formerly officer in the Imperial German Navy, and as such I was several years in the Tropics. From my own experience I learned during the first Great War the narrowness of an U.boat, without taking part in long front undertakings. I therefore have a conception of the enormous pressure on mind and body, under which the commanding officer as well as his comrades suffer.

During undertakings lasting many weeks, accompanied by very considerable air defence, as well as defence over and under the water, superhuman demands are made on the nerves of the U.Boat crew and especially on those of the commanding officer, added to this the remorseless heat against which there is no relief on an U.Boat. Nevertheless the Captain of a boat knows only his duty as a soldier, that is, to fulfil the orders given him, and to save his boat and crew for his country. Many critical moments can only be mastered by acting as swiftly as lightning, but each moment is a tremendous strain on the nerves of a young man with highest responsibility during the long front journey.

The men of U.Boats are more than any other boat's crews dependent on the quick decision of their commanding officer. In hundreds of cases his orders decide life or death of the crew. The inevitable consequence thereof, is the almost unconditional submission of each man under his commands and the confidence of the crew that the orders given are correct. There is no time for them to consider, for every wasted second may mean the death of all.

The conditions on a U.Boat are profoundly different to those of ordinary ships or the Army. Also the Air Force does not know the weeks and months of unbroken duty. Further one must consider the increasing intensity of the fighting on both sides during the long wartime. The sufferings of the German people became immense, and one can imagine that the knowledge of the loss of property and blood in home or family, effaced the measure of the border between what is allowed and what is a criminal act by the individual front soldier.

In the German Navy there has never been but one opinion which is, that a defenceless enemy should not be attacked. When in the case of the U.Boat 852 it happened otherwise, the explanation is to be found in the above mentioned circumstances which excluded a clear consideration.

The responsibility of every individual remains, but in the measuring of the punishment, I believe that a milder judgement of the crime should be allowed, which under normal circumstances or even on cool consideration would not be approved of even by the prisoners themselves.

After the war which the Germans lost, the misfortunes which have befallen our beautiful country, and the losses we have all suffered, our hearts are very heavy and everyone has his share of trouble to bear. In spite of all I as a man at the age of sixtytwo, who has spent never be forgotten happy days with Englishmen in pre-war time, and who loves his own country and is willing to do everything in order that our German people may again deserve the trust of other countries.

I personally take the liberty to beg for mercy for the condemned prisoners.

Very respectfully Yours,

Joachim L. ...